

# EMPLOYERS CAN MAKE PARKING

# EASIER

## *and Gain National Recognition*

Multi-Modal  
Options Are  
**KEY**

BY DENISE KEARNS

### TOO MANY PEOPLE, NOT ENOUGH PARKING.

It's an age-old problem faced by employers nationwide. Faced with the unappetizingly costly but typical solution of building more parking spaces, more and more employers are instead adding multi-modal transportation options to their parking management mix. These options include van-pool and shuttle services, subsidized transit, other ridesharing alternatives, and walking and biking opportunities. Studies show that in combination, these options decrease an employer's parking needs by 5 percent to 15 percent.



balancing parking supply and demand in communities where universities, municipalities, and other large employers share their parking facilities with students, visitors, and other travelers, is essential, and an integrated parking strategy that includes transportation alternatives can be just the ticket. Large employers and their employees can help leverage the value of area-

wide transportation services, maximize transit capacities, offset road congestion—especially during peak rush hours—and improve road safety. In urban centers and other busy metropolitan areas, integrated parking strategies can also reduce air, noise, and water pollution.

Rising gas prices and the re-emergence of energy conservation as a national security issue also have helped to renew interest in multi-modal transportation options on a national level. For employers, parking owners and operators, facility managers and other professionals working in the transportation business, a distinct trend toward integrating parking management strategies is on the horizon.

More than 1,500 employers are providing progressive commuting options to three million employees and have been formally recognized as Best Workplaces for Commuters. Best Workplaces for Commuters is a voluntary partnership program sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Through the partnership EPA provides national recognition, program materials, and support to help employers get started, network, and build their programs.

Many large employers participating in Best Workplaces for Commuters first started their programs out of a need to better meet employee parking requirements. They find that offering commuter benefits that meet the Best Workplaces for Commuters'





*National Standard of Excellence* (a requirement of the program) can help their bottom line and improve the quality of life for employees, neighboring residents, and surrounding communities—a win-win situation for all.

The three Best Workplaces for Commuters employers featured in this article fund their commute programs through the revenues generated by the parking facilities they own and/or operate. These employers have made a conscious decision to diversify and invest in alternative transportation because it makes good business sense. In addition to lowering new construction and maintenance costs, their programs have reduced parking demand and increased supply, bolstered community relations, built employee morale, and gained public recognition.

### **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, TWIN CITIES: A MATTER OF TIME AND OPPORTUNITY**

In the mid-1990s, the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, had just made substantial investments to increase its parking capacity, but then university spending priorities turned to funding new buildings and learning centers instead. That's when Bob Baker, director of parking and transportation services for the university, decided to turn to multi-modal options.

"Parking demand did not go away," says Baker, "but the space available on our campus is limited, and increasing our service debt (for parking) wasn't really an option. We had to look seriously at options that would reduce parking demand and expand supply."

The efforts paid off: the university earned the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation in 2003 and has received numerous awards from the state of Minnesota and private organizations. These rewards have helped raise visibility for the university, given the transportation program more credibility, and helped open doors with local transportation agencies, according to Baker.

The new approach got off the ground when the university decided to provide a carpool matching service to its 15,000+ staff and faculty. As an incentive, carpoolers were given preferred parking spaces and paid lower rates. The service remains popular today, with nearly 1,200 university employees sharing a ride to work on a daily basis.

Building on this effort, the university now offers

its employees a vanpool service. New this year, the service was developed in cooperation with the Twin Cities' regional planning organization, Metropolitan Council. The council subsidizes half the payment of the van lease, and employees are responsible for the rest. Baker expects between 10 and 20 vanpools will be formed within the next few years. The vans will be leased through VPSI, Inc., a national vanpool leasing organization that has similar agreements on college campuses throughout the country.

Transit services, which target the university's student population of over 50,000, are another key component in the university's strategy. At the same time it began providing carpool incentives, the university upgraded its on-campus shuttle service. A dedicated busway was opened, service hours were extended, and running frequency increased. Today the service meets the transportation needs of students living on campus, as well as students arriving and parking in one of the university's satellite parking facilities. On a daily basis, the system's 16 shuttle buses transport a combined average of nearly 26,000 passengers.

In addition to its campus shuttle service, about five years ago, the university negotiated with Metro-Transit, the Minneapolis/St. Paul transportation agency, to provide students with a discounted "U-Pass" that gives unlimited 24/7 access to any metro bus. This includes ridership throughout the entire Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Through the university program, the passes cost students \$60 per semester, and payments are charged directly to the student's tuition account.

"The U-Pass is extremely popular," said Baker. "Over 17,000 passes were sold last semester. Our estimate is that this program reduces parking demand by nearly 25 percent."

Based on its aggressive multi-modal approach, Baker estimates that 68 percent of students, staff and faculty, or other individuals use alternative transportation as a means of getting around on campus. This represents about a 10-percent increase over the past five years.

"We've seen our biggest increase in the use of transit," relates Baker, "and in all likelihood, that's where we'll be able to make further inroads."

Although the University of Minnesota's program started out primarily in response to a parking shortage, and largely continues for that reason today, Baker firmly believes that the program contributes to other goals that are equally important to the university.

"As an educational institution, we have a responsibility to our students, faculty, and the community," says Baker. "This is an opportunity to show how we can minimize our environmental impact, and that as individuals they can make a difference."



## LOS ANGELES WORLD AIRPORTS: REDUCING TRAFFIC CONGESTION, IMPROVING AIR QUALITY

"Traffic delays, congestion, poor air quality and the costs of getting around in a car in Los Angeles can be pretty steep for those of us working and living in the area," notes Devon Deming, Rideshare program manager for airport employees at the Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA)—another employer on the list of Best Workplaces for Commuters. "But we offer airport employees free parking within a stone's throw of our work site."

LAWA has been using an integrated parking strategy since 1989 to mitigate its imprint on local road congestion and air quality. According to Deming, it's taken time to get the program up and running, but roughly 20 percent of the workforce currently participates.

The program got a huge boost last year when LAWA doubled its subsidy for transit riders from \$50 a month to \$100 per month in January 2005. As a result of the increase, participation more than doubled in 2005, and continues to rise. In addition to offering a transit subsidy, employees have the option of joining a vanpool, where a \$60 monthly subsidy is provided. Overall, participation in all LAWA Rideshare programs has grown 132 percent since January 2004, from 473 to 622 participants. Deming expects participation will continue to increase over the next several years.

"We're not only covering more of the employee's commute cost, but we now have an automated system that makes it easier for employees to pick up their transit passes," relates Deming. "Gas costs also are giving people a reason to pause, especially for some of our employees who commute 100 miles or more round-trip. There's more interest than ever before."

Deming also notes that LAWA is involved in efforts to improve transportation options throughout the Los Angeles area, with a goal of making the airport more accessible to all. This includes increasing LAWA operated bus services to the LAX Terminal Area from remote locations such as Downtown L.A.'s Union Station, as well as offering free Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) shuttle connections from transit hubs along rail and bus systems operated by the city and county.

"Congestion around the airport is a near constant," she says. "With more transportation options to the airport, you can help reduce congestion and the time it takes to get here and get home. These kinds of services may make it easier for travelers, as well as employees to get in and out of LAWA, and that's our goal."

## COMMUTER BENEFITS MAKE FOR A LIVABLE COMMUNITY IN BOULDER, COLO.

Recognized internationally for its numerous creative programs to promote "green transportation," virtually all employers in downtown Boulder provide their employees with alternative transportation options for getting to and from work. This overwhelming support led EPA to designate the city of Boulder as its first "Best Workplaces for Commuters District."

Parking is a major factor influencing businesses operating in downtown Boulder, and their decision to support multi-modal transportation options. "Parking has been an issue in Boulder for years," notes Jan Ward, a transportation coordinator for the city. She explained that a temporary ban on new public parking construction from 1993 to 1998 contributed to the need to provide other transportation options. "We've been developing innovative programs to reduce demand and maximize capacity for years. You don't develop an integrated parking strategy overnight, and over time, I think there's a consensus that we've found a balance."

One of the most successful elements in Boulder's integrated strategy is its "Eco Pass," a transit pass that allows holders to ride on any of 17 bus routes that service downtown Boulder and the region surrounding the city within a 50 mile radius. These annual passes are distributed free of charge to all downtown employees who register for them.

This year the city projects that it will use \$465,000 in funds collected from the city's parking meters to purchase 6,000 Eco Passes for downtown employees. Based on a survey and analysis conducted in 1999, the city estimated that the Eco Pass program was reducing parking demand by 850 parking spaces; by 2005, a similar survey showed that the Eco Pass program reduces parking demand by up to 4,019 parking spaces.

Ward attributes this increase to improved services, the rising cost of gas, and a growing public awareness about the value of getting around without having to drive. She notes that over the years, Boulder has extended its daily M-F bus service so stops are made at all points along a route every 15 minutes during peak hours. In addition, the areas serviced by the bus system have grown so that the majority of users are within two blocks of a stop.

"This kind of service makes a tremendous difference," said Ward. "Obviously there are costs, but transportation requires a public investment, no matter what the mode. In Boulder we are committed to sustaining our community with an infrastructure that



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doesn't consist mostly of highways, streets, and parking structures."

"A clean, safe, and reliable transit system, along with bike paths, sidewalks, and other paths for walkers also need to be part of the picture."

Ward notes that biking, walking, and a Boulder-based rideshare program are key components in Boulder's integrated parking strategy. In combination, the city's recent survey shows that employees using these modes also help reduce parking demand.

Boulder has received accolades from all over the world for its sustainable approach to urban development and transportation. Though the city is proud of its achievements and reputation, that doesn't mean Boulder is "anti-parking."

"Our goal is to provide a well-balanced transportation system and that means integrating a total access plan in the downtown," said Ward. "Vehicles give us mobility, and they ask us for a parking space in return. That's fair, but there is a cost," said Ward. "In Boulder we've had the opportunity to develop a plan that more evenly spreads the costs of transportation around among our parking facilities, roads, bike racks, transit system, and greenways." ■

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